

Massenet's *Cendrillon*: Exploring the interactions of the orchestra and vocal line as found in the role of Cendrillon, and a dramatically rich role for the lyric mezzo soprano

By

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Abstract

Composer Jules-Émile- Frédéric Massenet wrote a variety of roles for mezzo sopranos, and his soaring vocal lines are coupled with sensitive communication of the text. In *Cendrillon*, Massenet writes leading roles for three mezzo soprano voices: Le Prince Charmant, Madame de la Haltière, Cendrillon (and one featured supporting role, the step-sister Dorothée). The three leading roles involve different vocal and dramatic demands, while still allowing the unique colors of the mezzo soprano voice to shine. I will explore Massenet's writing for the mezzo soprano and the interaction of the vocal line with the orchestra, in his "fairy tale" opera, *Cendrillon*.

I will analyze scenes that deal with the role of title character Cendrillon and the specific vocal qualities that Massenet highlights in each: Cendrillon's arias in Act I and Act III; the scene with La Feé in Act I; the duet with the Prince Charmant in Act II; and the duet / trio with Prince Charmant and La Feé that ends Act III.

Throughout the score of *Cendrillon*, Massenet demonstrates a wide range of compositional tools and a distinctive style in writing for the voice, characterized by unusual melodies and sweeping vocal lines underscored with lush orchestration. *Cendrillon* was composed in 1898 in the middle of Massenet's career (between the operas *Sapho* and *Grisélidis*) while working with French librettist Henri Cain.

Based on *Cendrillon*, as told by Charles Perrault, this treatment of the fairy tale is unique from her first appearance, as both composer and librettist introduce the title character as one with emotional breadth, not one that is resentful or defined by her current circumstances. Massenet's writing for her, from the Act I hearth song to her final duet with Prince Charming, "*Vous êtes mon Prince charmant*" (Act IV, Scene 3), showcases the

expressive power that is the hallmark of his operatic writing.

These selected scenes are only a few of the wonderful moments in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, and they provide a glimpse into a dramatically and vocally rich role for a lyric mezzo-soprano. In the character of Cendrillon, Massenet and Caïn have created a role with great depth, incredibly beautiful vocal lines, and something that is truly rare for mezzos in the operatic canon: the chance to end up with the prince.

In the operatic canon there are seemingly endless possibilities as to the types of roles, vocal and dramatic demands for the mezzo soprano voice. The unique timbre of the mezzo soprano voice, along with operatic convention, have traditionally led composers to cast mezzos as: older women, nurses, confidantes, men and young boys (in the case of trouser roles).

However, there are some notable exceptions. Sometimes the mezzo soprano is allowed to be the leading lady. Such examples can be found in the compositions of Rossini, who wrote many leading roles for virtuosic mezzos such as Maria Malibran and Isabella Colbran; Bizet, whose *Carmen* is probably one of the most famous operatic mezzos; and, as I will explore here, Massenet.

Massenet wrote a variety of roles for mezzo sopranos, and his soaring vocal lines are coupled with sensitive communication of the text. In *Cendrillon*, Massenet writes leading roles for three mezzo soprano voices: Le Prince Charmant, Madame de la Haltière, Cendrillon (and one featured supporting role, the step-sister Dorothée). The three leading roles involve different vocal and dramatic demands, while still allowing the unique colors of the mezzo soprano voice to shine. I will explore Massenet's writing for the mezzo soprano and the interaction of the vocal line with the orchestra, in his "fairy tale" opera, *Cendrillon*.

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Born in Montaud, St Etienne on May 12, 1842, Jules-Émile- Frédéric Massenet seems to have entered into a musical life quite naturally. He was the youngest of four children; his mother Eléonore-Adelaïde Royer de Marancour was a gifted pianist, and "the very model of a

wife and mother,” as Massenet described her, took an interest in his musical inclinations.¹

His father, however, was not of a particularly musical bent, but was rather of an “industrial nature,” as a student of a Polytechnic School. After his studies he worked in the iron industry. Massenet wrote an autobiographical sketch in *The Century Magazine* in November 1892 and said this of his father’s career: “He thus became an iron-master, and was the inventor of those huge hammers which, crushing steel with extraordinary power by a single blow ... So it was that, to the sound of heavy hammers of brass, as the ancient poet says, I was born.”²

Massenet followed the archetypal course for a French composer; he began his studies at the Conservatoire at the age of 11. Just two years later, his father’s health made it impossible for the family to remain in Paris, and they moved to Chambéry in January of 1855.³ In October of that same year he returned to Paris, and in 1861 began compositional studies with Ambroise Thomas.

Finck notes that during this time Massenet earned money to help pay his tuition by playing percussion three nights a week in the orchestra of the Théâtre Lyrique. He used any extra to further his studies in composition. In 1863 Massenet was awarded the Grand Prix de Rome, and spent the next year traveling and finding inspiration, as well as meeting the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt. Through Liszt he was introduced to Mademoiselle de Sainte-Marie, whom he married in 1866.

He found success early on composing orchestral works and sacred music. While those works were well-received by critics and the general public alike, he came to make a name for

¹ Hugh Macdonald, et al., “Massenet, Jules.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* (Oxford University Press). Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/51469>>

² Henry Theophilus Finck, *Massenet and His Operas* (New York: John Lane, 1910), 21.

³ Ibid. 23.

himself in opera. He became one of the most successful composers of opera in France at the end of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th. Massenet found his own voice during the fin de siècle, and also drew inspiration from his instructors, most notably composer Ambroise Thomas. Contemporaries of Massenet that were seeking to make their own marks on the musical landscape included Camille Saint-Saëns, Georges Bizet, Gabriel Fauré, Léo Delibes, and Henri Duparc.⁴

Even with such formidable contemporaries, Massenet found a way to set himself apart. Author Hugh Macdonald notes Massenet's unique understanding of the orchestra and the specific instrumentation that he used to create such vivid pictures in his operas. He draws the comparison of Massenet's use of the orchestra to a "highly flexible instrument that he played upon with consummate skill;" Macdonald specifically mentions his use of "special" instrumentation, such as the use of the saxophone in *Werther* (1892) and the viola d'amore in *Cendrillon* (1899)⁵. In his accompaniments for the vocal lines in his operas, Massenet manages the colors of the orchestral timbres brilliantly, using specific instrumentation to further illustrate the dramatic underpinning of his works.

Throughout the score of *Cendrillon*, Massenet demonstrates a wide range of compositional tools and a distinctive style in writing for the voice, characterized by unusual melodies and sweeping vocal lines underscored with lush orchestration. In his book *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style*, Steve Huebner comments on Massenet's compositional style:

⁴ Macdonald et. al, "Massenet"

⁵ Hugh Macdonald, *Beethoven's Century: Essays on Composers and Themes* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2008), 89.

With the banner of aesthetic independence raised ever higher in public polemics about opera in the fin de siècle, Massenet exhibited an older compositional *mentalité*, one that by no means shunned novelty, but that also showed nothing inherently wrong with writing to order and liberally using what had worked well before.⁶

Massenet was no stranger to drawing inspiration from literary sources for his works. Some examples are: Goethe's *Werther*, Beaumarchais's Figaro plays [specifically *Le Mariage de Figaro*], the tale of Ariadne from Greek mythology, as well as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. His fifteenth theatrical work found its beginnings in the pages of Charles Perrault's *Cendrillon*. Even the title of this work was different: Massenet specified that it was not an opera, but a fairy tale set to music and chose to call it *Conte de Fees en Quatre Actes et Six Tableaux*.

Massenet's opera *Cendrillon* was composed in 1898 in the middle of his career (between the operas *Sapho* and *Grisélidis*) while working with French librettist Henri Caïn. Drawing on 18th century conventions and character structure, *Cendrillon* opens with an amusing scene in “pseudo classical fashion” where the servants are complaining about the treatment they receive from the lady of the house, Madame de la Haltière.⁷

Born in Paris in 1859, Caïn was a noted writer and librettist. A member of an artistic family (his father was sculptor Auguste-Nicolas Caïn, while his brother Georges was a painter) he was also noted as a multi-talented artist. As a painter, he was known throughout Europe for his portraits and historical works before he became a writer. His body of work includes plays, novels, essays and 40 librettos, all written over 40 years.

As a librettist he is noted for his collaborations with Massenet, which began in 1894 with

⁶ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26.

⁷ Hugh Macdonald, *Beethoven's Century*, 90.

La Navarraise.⁸ Three years later Caïn collaborated with Arthur Bernède and Massenet on the libretto for *Sapho* before working on *Cendrillon*, which was completed in 1899. Moving away from the realism and verismo styles they had recently explored, Massenet and Caïn reverted to a much less realistic manner for their take on one of Charles Perrault's best-loved fairy-tales.

Perrault is noted for his interpretations of fairy tales which he wrote over a period of several years and collected for publication in Paris in 1697. His treatments of these traditional stories, *Histoires, ou Contes du temps passé*, include such familiar tales as *La belle au bois dormant*, *Cendrillon* and *La barbe bleue*; these would inspire a wide range of music, including operas and ballets by composers such as Rossini, Offenbach, Ravel, Tchaikovsky, Bartók and Massenet.⁹

Cendrillon, as told by Charles Perrault, is not a lengthy work, and a poem at the end of the tale summarizes its morals. The first is that graciousness is more important than beauty and is a true gift of the fairies, and the second, that even those endowed with the best talents may not succeed without the help of a fairy godmother.¹⁰ While Caïn retained the majority of Perrault's story, he chose to embellish certain details in order to better serve the "fairy tale" aspect.

One example is during Act I, where an entire chorus of spirits, not just the Fairy Godmother, come to Cendrillon's aid as she prepares for the ball. Additional material is also added in Act III, during the moving aria /duet /trio at the base of the oak tree.

The opera saw its first performance in Paris at the Opera-Comique, on May 24, 1899, and

⁸Christopher Smith. "Cain, Henri." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 12 Mar. 2014
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/O004934>>.

⁹Laurence de Laubadère and Manuel Couvreur, "Perrault, Charles," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 12 Mar. 2014
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/21364>>.

¹⁰ Charles Perrault, *Histoires du temps passé, ou les contes de ma Mere L'Oye avec des moralités; par M. Perrault. Nouvelle edition, augmentée de deux nouvelles, savior: de L'Adroite princess & de La veuve & ses deux filles Ornée de figures en taille douce*. (Londres; et se trouve à Bruxelles, chez B. Le Franq, 1786).

was well received by critics and the general public alike. Albert Carre directed the premiere.¹¹

Contemporary critic Adolphe Jullien said:

It must have been a pleasant pastime for Massenet, to busy himself with this light poem, to exercise his skill and experience in inventing music equally airy and diminutive ... and it is only just to say that he succeeded. This score is one of those in which he has shown the greatest suppleness and skill, without putting much musical pith into it, but lavishing ingenious effects of rhythm, odd contrasts of colours, and enlivening volumes of sound whenever the attention is in danger of flagging.¹²

Other early critics of *Cendrillon* included Louis Schneider, who commented that Massenet "dusted the tale of Perrault and the libretto of Henri Cain with a fine powder of sounds." He also noted the historical "nods" that Massenet made to the dance music of French monarch Louis XIII in the act one scene with Madame de la Haltière, the entry of the Princesses in act two, and the rigaudon, also found in act two. Schneider notes, "... all this is like bringing back to life the colours of that time; it means a power of penetration, a sharpness of vision which pierces the ages — in a word, a skill that borders on the marvellous."¹³

Perrault's *Cendrillon* is different than traditional Brothers Grimm, Walt Disney, or other modern takes on the tale. While Cain effectively creates a fantastical look into fairyland, he also masterfully illustrates the faults of the very human world in which *Cendrillon* finds herself. By choosing to open the opera in the home of *Cendrillon*'s stepmother, Madame de la Haltière, Cain satirizes *Cendrillon*'s family, and Massenet's music compliments his libretto. *Cendrillon*'s

¹¹ Finck, *Massenet and His Operas*, 203.

¹² Ibid, 203-204.

¹³ Ibid, 205.

father, Pandolfe is no longer absent from this storyline, but instead plays the role of an overrun husband.

In Act I, Scene 2, Pandolfe is the first of the principal characters to make an appearance. Speaking directly to the servants during his first aria, “*Du côté de la barbe*,” he expresses his frustration with his wife and his desire to be a master rather than a subject. Massenet begins the story dramatically by having the orchestra play in staccato bursts while the full chorus appears onstage as the servants of the house, who are frantically running about, attempting to keep up with Madame’s demands.

Taken directly from the Italian *buffa* tradition, Massenet uses a nervous, patter-like setting for Pandolfe while he explains his plight and laments over Madame’s conceited daughters, Noémie and Dorothée. He asks the gods why he ever left his peaceful country life to remarry a countess with a dowry and a “fearsome temper.” However, when Pandolfe speaks about the unfortunate fate that has befallen his daughter named Lucette, (who is known as Cendrillon) due to the marriage, he sings in a much more lyrical and intimate style. Pandolfe goes on to speak of a time in the future when he will eventually be master of the house.

Madame Haltière enters in the following scene to a grand, regal fanfare, but she quickly becomes a comedic figure as she explains to her daughters her plan to attract Prince Charming’s attention at the ball. The aria turns into an ensemble as they all chatter about the upcoming ball and sing along in an affected, slightly off kilter, and rather waltz-like minuet. The family departs for the king’s palace in a flurry of activity and crescendo from the orchestra.

Cendrillon makes her first appearance in Act I, Scene 5, and Massenet effectively sets the scene by using the oboe and strings in octaves to introduce the thematic line that Cendrillon soon takes over, as a more serious and non-caricatured tone set in. In example 1 below, one can

observe the detail that Massenet brought to his scores, with his stylistic markings of “*d’une allure mélancolique*” (with wistfulness or melancholy) and the tempo marking of “*sans lenteur*” (without slowness).

Other expressive markings are given to the orchestral lines (here, the piano reduction) of “*dolce*” (sweetly) or to the dynamic markings for Cendrillon “*piu*” (a little) before her “*forte*” dynamic marking before the “*animé*” (lively) tempo at the end of the page. In the example 1, from Cendrillon’s first aria “*Ah! Que mes soeurs sont heureuses!*” (Ah! But my sisters are happy!), Massenet takes great care and is very specific in the placement of fermatas, crescendos, diminuendos and tenuto markings in the vocal line.

Caïn opens the aria with the phrase “*Ah! que mes soeurs sont heureuse!*” giving us an insight to Cendrillon as a character. Instead of her first line being one of anger or resentment that her sisters will go to the ball instead of her, she simply remarks on how happy they are, perhaps with some envy, but definitely not with malice. Sitting by the fire, Cendrillon repeatedly sings the wistful melody to the text “*Reste au foyer petit grillon, résigne-toi Cendrille...*” (Stay at the hearth, little cricket, resign yourself Cendrille...). Between repetitions of her melancholy tune, she abruptly switches into a joyous, waltz-like strain.

The main melody, which is originally introduced by the oboes is lilting, emphasized by the use of eighth notes rising up to the dotted quarter, which lends a folk-song-like quality to the line. Although this melody is simple in nature and almost child-like, for the mezzo soprano voice it is also challenging. When it later appears in the vocal line, it begins on a G natural above middle C, (G4) and rises up the scale to end on a D natural (D5). The orchestration is very minimal; only strings playing very softly on the first half of the measure.

Example 1. Act 1 Scene 5, “Ah! Que mes soeurs sont heureuses!”¹⁴

SCÈNE V.
(CENDRILLON paraît) 66 = ♩ .
d'une allure mélancolique – sans lenteur.

pp m.g. mystérieux et calme. dol.

mf m.g.

– CENDRILLON. *mf (pensive)*

Ah! que mes sœurs sont heu-
Plus lent.

dol. mf pp

dim. più f

-reu - - - ses! Pour el - les c'est chaque jour nouveau plaisir...
Plus animé.

¹⁴ Jules Massenet and Henri Caïn, *Cendrillon: Conte De Fées En 4 Actes Et 6 Tableaux. D'Après Perrault Parition Chant Et Piano.* (Paris: Heugel, 1899), 75.

The meter then shifts from 6/8 to 12/8, and Cendrillon must sustain a D natural for the entire measure and through the downbeat of the next. While the actual pitches are not outside of the mezzo range, the tessitura can prove to be difficult to sustain while keeping the light and bright tone quality that is needed to accurately communicate the mood and text. Layered underneath Cendrillon's vocal line, Massenet uses the orchestra to create a high, drone-like shimmer in the strings.

From her first appearance, both composer and librettist introduce Cendrillon as a character of emotional breadth, not one that is resentful or defined by her current circumstances. Massenet's writing for her, from this hearth song to her final duet with Prince Charming, "*Vous êtes mon Prince charmant*" (Act IV, Scene 3), showcases the expressive power that is the hallmark of his operatic writing.

While she does consider that she would love to attend the ball, Cendrillon states that her housework and duties dictate that she must stay. After completing her chores, she falls asleep with a final repetition of the phrase "*Resigne-toi.*" Massenet then introduces the character of La Feé, ever familiar in the Cinderella story as the fairy godmother. In the following scene with the fairies, Massenet uses the orchestra to create a seamless transition from Cendrillon's monologue and dream to an otherworldly atmosphere.

The scene opens with the Fairy Godmother (La Feé) singing arpeggiated scales as she calls to her subordinate fairies to her assistance, while the orchestra provides a subtle yet otherworldly support to help created the scene. After the orchestral transition, La Feé sings the following:

Ah! douce enfant, ta plainte légère comme l'haleine d'une fleur,
vient du monter jusqu'à mon cœur. Ta marraine te voit et te protège; espère!

Ah, sweet child, your plaint subdued, like the breath of a flower,
has just risen up to my heart. Your godmother sees you and protects you, have hope!¹⁵

Following this is a magical scene where La Feé, who is assisted by “les six esprits,” a female chorus that begins in three parts but quickly moves into a double chorus of three parts each. She acts as a mistress of ceremonies, calling upon them for help while providing specific instruction about the details of the dress and carriage. Caïn’s libretto truly shines in this aria, with descriptive language that Massenet pairs beautifully with the dream and he brings out new colors from the strings in the orchestra. While she instructs the other spirits, La Feé sings:

Pour en faire un tissu magiquement soyeux dont vous composerez sa robe,
que votre main adroitement dérobe aux astres radieux la subtile splendeur
rayons joyeux, a clair de lune empruntez ses pâleurs, empruntez à l’arc-en-ciel
ses harmonies, et que pour son bouquet, par vous soient réunis en un philtre
d’amour les senteurs les plus douces! ... Et vous, préparez l’attelage! ...
Tous les petits oiseaux nous prêteront leurs ailes, les coursiers seront les
insectes frêles, les phalènes, les papillons, et les légère demoiselles;
habiles artisans, fournissez-nous des pierreries, allez en butinant dans les
prairies cochenilles et vers luisants! Que les moucheron et les scarabes
églaient des rubis les purs scintillements. Aux larmes de la nuit, sur les roses
pâmées donnez l’éclat des diamants. Et pour éclairer son chemin, vous cacherez
des lucioles au fond des tulipiers et du jasmin!

This enchanting speech, translated into English, is as follows:

In order for you to fashion a magically silky dress for her, may your hand
skillfully steal from the radiant stars the subtle splendor of their joyous rays
of light from the moonlight borrow its wan colors, borrow from the rainbow its
harmonies (of colors), and that for her bouquet, by you may be gathered in a love-draught,
the scents most sweet! ... And you, prepare the carriage! ...
All the little birds will lend us their wings, frail insects will be our steeds,
the moths and butterflies, and the slight dragonflies; artful artisans, furnish us
with gemstones, go a-gathering in the prairies, lady-birds and fireflies! Let
gnats and beetles reflect the pure sparkle of rubies. Make every tear of dewey
night sparkle with the dazzle of a diamond. And to illuminate her path, you will
hide some glow-worms amid the tulips and jasmine!

¹⁵ Nico Castel, Marcie Stapp, Scott Jackson. Wiley, Michel Singher, and Jules Massenet. *French Opera Libretti* (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 1999). 133. All text translations from this source unless otherwise specified.

With assistance from the other spirits, she then wakes Cendrillon, now fully dressed in her ball attire, to send her on her way. Massenet quotes from the end of her first aria in the orchestra as she slowly wakes and realizes her fairy godmother's handiwork, singing "*Enfin, je connaîtrai les bonheur à mon tour!*" (At last it will be my turn to be happy!), before realizing that her dream was real. Thrilled at her new attire and the prospect of attending the ball, she quickly remembers that her family will be there and that she could be recognized.

Here the tale begins to sound more familiar: the fairy godmother gives her a crystal slipper, which she explains has the power to make her unrecognizable, and warns Cendrillon that she must return home by midnight. This scene is a joyous dialogue between Cendrillon, La Feé, and the female chorus, where Massenet alternates between lyrical vocal lines and march-like rhythms in the orchestra that drive the action forward to the exciting conclusion of Act I.

Act II is set at the ball and includes a series of dances, or *entrées*. While they add dramatic interest to the visual depiction of the grandness of the ball, they are also a nod to the long tradition of character dances in French opera. The opening scene of Act II contains five *entrées*: *les filles de noblesse*, *les fiancés*, *les mandores*, *la florentine*, ending with the king's rigadoun or *le rigodon du roi*. While antiquated even in Massenet's own time, this dance evokes Cendrillon's "long ago" world. After the colorful presentation of the prospective fiancée's the chorus exclaims "*Choisissez! Epousez!*" (Choose one and marry her!) to the forlorn and overwhelmed Prince Charmant. A "*suite dansante*" signals the entry of numerous guests, including Pandolfe, Madame Haltière, and her excited daughters. Cendrillon then makes her entrance, and, while Haltière and her daughters scoff at the new arrival, the other guests—including the Prince—are entranced by her appearance, wondering who the "charming creature" could be.

Throughout the score of *Cendrillon* Massenet employs a wide range of compositional tools. There are gorgeous, lyrical melodies, sweeping lush ensembles, lively dances and marches, patter arias, and comedic ensembles. Although there is beauty to be found in the complexity of the grand scenes, there are other moments that seem to break out of the grand opera tradition in their simplicity. One example is the duet between Cendrillon and Prince Charmant at the end of act II. Caïn again uses the text to create an ethereal scene as she responds:

Vous l'avez dit, je suis le rêve, et dois passer sans qu'il en reste trace ...
comme s'efface un reflet du ciel que l'on voit glisser sur l'eau, que le vent
ride et pousse ... et qui bientôt ira se perdre dans la mousse ...

You have said it: I am the dream, and must pass without there remaining a
trace ... as vanishes a reflection of the sky that one sees gliding over the water,
which the wind furrows and impels ... and which soon will lose itself in the moss.

Massenet sets this text delicately, with sparse accompaniment from the strings in the orchestra. When the prince responds that he would rather die than lose Cendrillon, the orchestra swells in a declamatory, sweeping statement from the strings. The prince sings repeating notes, rising a fourth in stepwise motion in a much quicker tempo, which Massenet uses to effectively show the desperation that the prince suddenly feels. He goes on to doubt her refusal and pleads again, saying that her eyes tell the truth, and that she loves him as well. Caïn's libretto is heartfelt, straightforward and every bit the fairytale.

PRINCE :	I would lose you, I? No! Rather death! Whoever you may be, everywhere, I want to follow your steps!
CENDRILLON:	No, I will flee, alas, and you shall never see me again!
PRINCE:	Ah! That cruel word, is it really you who has said it? How your sweet lip(s) can they utter it? Your eye(s) guileless belie it!

Cendrillon's response to the Prince's plea is one of highlights that caught Julien's attention at the premiere. "It seems to me that the most graceful passage in the whole world is probably the tender declaration of Cendrillon: 'You are my Prince Charmant,' where the oboe repeats bar by bar, with intense sweetness what the voice has just sung."¹⁶

The vocal line here is a soaring yet simple refrain, where a single oboe echoes Cendrillon. An octave leap from D natural (D4) to the octave above (D5) begins each statement of "*vous etes mon prince charmant...*" While there is a definite tempo, each phrase seems to lean into the next, with the vocal line leading. Notations in the accompaniment include "*suivez*" (follow) and "*en cédant*" (yielding), which indicate that the orchestra should take expressive cues from and closely follow the vocal line.

The refrain is extremely lyrical and only steps outside of the octave (D4 to D5) range once: on Cendrillon's fourth and final repeat of the phrase "*vous etes mon prince charmant...*," which rises to a G natural above the staff (G5). Massenet indicates that this should not be a powerful moment, but instead one that is "tenderly expressive" (See Example 2 below).

By repeating the thematic material in the vocal line with subtle changes to allow for the text to be brought out in a different way (also found in Cendrillon's aria in act I), Massenet effectively conveys a different emotion - or a different color within the same emotion - each time. As the phrases in the vocal line (followed in canon by a solo oboe in the orchestra) are nearly identical, Massenet is very detailed with the expressive markings. Notations such as '*simple et tendre*', '*expressiv*', '*sans presser*', '*en cedant*' and '*dolce*' are found in the vocal line, and he specifies dynamic contrast, tenuto markings and breath marks for the singer as well.¹⁷

¹⁶ Finck, *Massenet and His Operas*, 204-205.

¹⁷ Massenet, *Cendrillon*. 205-207.

Cendrillon's monologue turns into a dialogue, where Cendrillon and the prince sing to each other, almost finishing one another's phrases before switching to a duet, where both sing at the same time. While initially their lines are different, the orchestra swells as they each profess their love, and the two voices eventually end up in unison, but with their own independent texts.

CENDRILLON: His voice is like a harmony that ravishes my ear and keeps my heart charmed! Yes, with the mere remembrance of this hour blessed, My spirit shall remain scented!

PRINCE: Stay and take pity on my worried heart! Waken in my spirit the infinite scented sweetness of April's innocent charm. Forever scented! I love you and will love you always!

In this act II duet, the appeal of Cendrillon's vocal line is found in the simplicity of the melodic line paired with the sensitive treatment in the orchestral accompaniment, but when combined with the depth of Caïn's libretto it is truly memorable. I definitely agree with Julien that this scene is standout moment in an opera that is already full of gorgeous melodies.

Example 2. Act II Scene IV¹⁸

en cédant. - - - - - *dol.* - - - - - , *rall.* - - - - - - CENDRILLON. *p*

le
p.
œil can - di - - - - de la dément... Vous
en cédant. - - - - - *dol.* *pp* *rall.* - - - - -

suivez.

Très modéré. 76 = ♩
simple et tendre.

c.
é - tes mon Prin - ce Char - mant, Et si j'é - coulais mon en -
Très modéré. (en imitant Cendrillon). *p*
simple et tendre. *pp*

expressif.

c.
- vi - - e, Je vou - drais con - sà - crer ma - vi - e À vous com -
expressif.

¹⁸ Massenet, *Cendrillon*, 205.

Act III opens with Cendrillon's second aria, "*Enfin ... je suis ici*". After fleeing the ball (and the Prince) when the clock strikes midnight, she finds herself back at home with only one slipper, afraid that someone from her family will find out that she was at the ball. The orchestra dramatically opens the act, with the strings evoking the breathlessness of Cendrillon after running all the way home. Cendrillon's second aria, like the first, is a fully evolved scene where Caïn and Massenet give the audience a look into her as a character.

The tempo is quick (quarter note = 132) with the expression marking of "*Vif et agité*" or "lively and restless." Massenet uses a rhythmic motive in the strings of two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth that repeats throughout the aria, evoking the frantic emotional state of Cendrillon, and mimicking running, as she retells the story of her journey home after the ball. Ever mindful of each detail, Massenet notates everything from dynamic markings to when the curtain should rise and when Cendrillon should appear onstage.

Beginning with a section of accompanied recitative, she realizes that she has made it home and is safe at last. She goes on to describe her fear of the unknown surroundings, the dark, of being discovered by her family, of losing the other slipper, and, most importantly, she apologizes repeatedly to the fairy godmother for not being home by midnight.

The recitative continues with a sentimental recollection of how she fled "into the night solitary" and lost her slipper. This lovely moment is highlighted with a key change, as she describes the shoe and calls out her fairy godmother, then quickly returns to the original key as the frantic passage in the strings returns. While she pleads for forgiveness, Massenet uses a descending motive in the vocal line on the words "*Marraine!*" (Godmother) that repeats each time she calls out to her.

As the aria progresses, the rhythmic motive from the introduction returns as she sings

in detail of the sights she saw. Staccato markings in the vocal line further accentuate the short lines of her tale, as if it is difficult for her to fully form the phrases. About three quarters of the way through the aria, a loud bell pealing the first phrase of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" in quarter notes dramatically interrupts her tale, played by the chimes in the orchestra.¹⁹

Cendrillon responds:

"Un grand bruit éclate et me glace. De sinistre frissons:" ("A great noise resounds and makes me freeze with terror. Sinister shivers")

In an abrupt shift, she realizes that it was not the clock chiming again, but rather, the church bells. Taking comfort in this, the mood of the piece changes from frantic and terrified to joyful and resolved. Singing of how the church bells have spoken to her in their own language, saying that they are "watching over" her, the vocal line now mimics the sound of the bells with a staccato coloratura passage. Ending the aria with a newfound courage and hope for her future, Cendrillon repeats the refrain of encouragement she imagines is coming from the bells: "Reprends courage! Courage! Allons courage Va!" (Take care courage! Courage! Come now go!).

"*Enfin, je suis ici ...*" is a challenging scene musically and dramatically, and a vocal tour de force for Cendrillon, which shows great variety in articulation and range, and offers the chance for great dramatic changes to the expressive vocal line. The scene does not end with this aria, but goes on to show yet another side of Cendrillon's character, as her mood quickly changes from one of victory to one that is more rooted in the reality of her current situation.

¹⁹ Massenet would have known this tune as the familiar French song "Ah ! Vous dirais-je Maman." It is interesting to note that the original French text involves a young girl confiding in her mother, the way that Cendrillon is attempting to confide in her fairy godmother.

Mais s'en est fait, hélas! Du ball et des splendeurs! Et je n'entendrai plus les paroles si tendres qui me berçaient d'espairs menteurs! Mon bonheur s'est éteint .. Il n'en reste que cendres ... Résigne-toi, petit grillon!

But it's all over, alas! With the ball and the splendor! And I shall not hear ever again the words so tender that lulled me with hopes lying! My happiness has been snuffed out; There is nothing left but ashes! ... Resign yourself, little cricket!

Massenet abruptly changes the mood in the orchestration as he drops the orchestra back from the full, triumphant ending of the entire orchestra playing major chords in their loudest dynamic, to a single unison note (the tonic of the previous chords) in the strings, with a fermata preceding to the vocal entrance. The tempo markings here also suggest a shift in mood, as the quarter note = 92, with the descriptive words "*Moins vite*" or "less life." Over Cendrillon's vocal entrance the word "*découragée*" or "disheartened" is notated. Completing the dramatic arc of the full scene, Massenet includes a direct quotation from Cendrillon's aria in Act I with the phrase "*Résigne-toi.*" Cendrillon then hears her family coming home from the ball, and she quickly exits to avoid being caught.

The last scenes I would like to explore are Act III, First Tableau, Scene II; and Act III, Second Tableau, Scenes I & II. After her exit in the previous scene, Cendrillon returns to the room to hear the tale of the "*inconnue*" - the unknown princess who appeared at the ball. After an argument with Pandolfe and an aria of her own, Madame Haltière and her stepdaughters recount the scene, which is set by Massenet as a lively patter ensemble. The three women describe in detail their version of what happened at the ball, including the "unknown" woman who was "dressed without any taste" who "dared to speak to the son of the King" and then fled the ball due to "their general contempt." Madame goes on to explain that the woman was clearly a "trollop fit for hanging."

Upon hearing this news, Cendrillon faints, while Pandolfe sends off Madame and her

daughters. When she awakes, they sing a wonderful duet speaking about how he realizes the sacrifices that she has made due to his decision to seek a life at court and marry Madame. Quoting from a lyrical section during Pandolfe's opening aria, they both sing in unison of a time when they might return to their once simple life in the country. It is a touching moment in the midst of the emotional rollercoaster that has been Act III so far, and one where Massenet's gift for soaring melodies takes center stage.

After a plan has been made and Pandolfe exits, Cendrillon has a solo scene, where she reconsiders going to the country with her father, stating that her grief is "too much" for her father to bear. Massenet uses soaring melodies with large leaps in the vocal line as she recalls Prince Charmant before moving towards a stepwise, though sometimes chromatic, melody as she sentimentally recalls the few pleasures she has had. She sings a gorgeous short aria, full of plaintive, lyrical lines as she says goodbye to her little room and her favorite belongings, such as the chair where she used to sit at the feet of her mother.

It is here that Caïn includes the only mention of her birth mother; a particularly moving moment occurs when she sings a phrase (with only a single note accompaniment from the strings) from a lullaby that her mother used to sing to her (see example 3). Cendrillon remembers her mother as she sings 2 four measure phrases with the text "Sleep my little angel, sleep as Jesus in the manger."

Massenet uses the expressive marking "*tres caressant*" or "very affectionate and soft" in the vocal line.

Example 3. Act III Scene IV ²⁰

Même mouv! *pp* *più p de suite.*

C. «C'est l'Angé - lus, — Dors, mon pe - tit an - ge. dors com - me Jé -

Même mouv!

Parlé' (en sanglotant):
Maman! Maman! Maman!!

C. - sus — Dormait dans la gran - - - ge.»

rall.

rall.

suivez.

As Cendrillon cries at the remembrance of her mother, the mood then quickly shifts again and she reconsiders going to the country with her father, stating again that her grief is “too much” for her father to bear. She instead chooses to sacrifice herself for her father’s

²⁰ Massenet, *Cendrillon*, 266.

happiness. Making a dramatic exit, she vows to run away to die and end her father's suffering.

Although it is difficult to choose standout moments from an already beautiful score, I feel that the following scene, which includes the aria, duet and trio between the characters of Prince Charmant, Cendrillon and La Fée, deserves comment.

At a large oak tree in an enchanted forest, a chorus of female sprites inform La Fée of Cendrillon and Prince Charmant's current state of despair. While Cendrillon is despondent over her grief at the tale that she heard from Madame, the Prince is equally upset with how things ended at the ball. La Fée begins the scene with an aria, and Massenet creates another ethereal scene. Floating above the female chorus (which is noted in the score as *choeur invisible*), La Fée sings of "fleeting fancies" and "glimmers ephemeral," giving direction to the sprites as they work to draw the two lovers together. She instructs the flowers to create a wall so that the Prince and Cendrillon cannot see each other as they sing:

CENDRILLON:	À deux genoux, bonne marraine, j'implore mon pardon de vous, di je vous ai fait moindre peine. Je viens à vous.
	On two knees, good godmother, I implore my forgiveness from you, if I have caused you the least distress. I come to you.
PRINCE:	Je viens à vous puissante reine, et vous demande à deux genoux, de vouloir terminer ma piene. Je viens à vous.
	I come to you powerful queen, and implore you on two knees, to acced ending my suffering. I come to you.

Although the two voices are written in unison, they have slightly different texts until the end of the third page of the duet, when they sing "*Je viens à vous.*" Massenet sets these opening lines of the duet in a lilting yet forward-leaning rhythmic pattern (see example 4). The repetition of quarter/eighth/quarter/eighth followed by an echo in the strings occurs throughout this first

section of the duet, as Cendrillon and Charmant individually plead their cases to La Feé. The oboe outlines the melody in two-measure long phrases, starting on the second beat of each measure.

As the ranges of the voices in this duet are so close - they sing in unison at times, as well echo each other - in this duet,²¹ it is interesting to note that the role of Prince Charmant was originally written for a mezzo soprano or “Falcon Soprano.”

The term was coined by the French Soprano Marie Cornélie Falcon, who was known for specific vocal attributes associated with roles that became her signatures. These include long lyrical melodic lines and sustained high notes approached by ascending leaps.²² The role of the Prince Charmant definitely contains moments that showcase these characteristics.

With the addition of a “*plus animé, agité*” tempo marking, Prince Charmant sings of his despair over losing Cendrillon at the ball. Unable to see who is calling out to the fairy godmother, Cendrillon hears his plight and begins to advocate for him herself. Cendrillon offers to sacrifice herself to suffer for the “*pauvre âme*” (poor soul that suffers), stating that there is nothing left for her but sadness and misery.

²¹ An accepted vocal substitution in performances has been made with a tenor singing the role of Prince Charmant, giving a very different timbre to this duet.

²² Philip E.J. Robinson and Benjamin Walton, “Falcon, Cornélie,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/09256>>.

Example 4. Act III, Duxième Tableau, Scene II, Pages 287-288.²³

SCÈNE II. (CENDRILLON et le PRINCE CHARMANT arrivent chacun de leur côté. Ils s'agenouillent sans se voir. Ils sont séparés par une haie de fleurs. et ils adressent leur prière à LA FÉE)

Modéré. (sans lenteur)

80 = ♩.

p

mf *p* *mf* *pp*

—CENDRILLON.
p (simple et fervent)
A deux ge - noux, Bonne Mar - rai - ne, à deux ge - noux, —

p —LE PRINCE CHARMANT.
Je viens à vous, Puissante Rei - ne, je viens à vous, —

p

c. J'im - plo - re mon pardon — de vous, Si je vous ai

1^{re} p. Et vous de - mande à deux ge - noux De vouloir ter -

pp

²³ Massenet, *Cendrillon*, 287-288.

C. *mf* fait moindre pei - - - ne. *mf* À deux ge - noux, je vous im -

le *mf* - mi - ner ma pei - - - ne. *mf* Je viens à vous, je vous im -

mf *p* *mf*

C. *f* - plo - - - re à deux ge - noux,

le *f* plo - - - re à deux ge - noux,

f *p* *p*

en cédant un peu. *a Tempo.*

C. *p* Si je vous ai fait moindre pei - - - ne. *f* Bon - ne Mar. *p*

le *p* Vou - lez-vous ter - mi - ner ma pei - - - ne. *f* Puis - san - te *p*

en cédant un peu. *a Tempo.*

p *p*

The duet continues, with the Prince expressing gratitude to the young woman that he cannot see, and they again return to the initial theme in unison, but this time with much more intensity and a slight difference in the text.

Ayez pitié, bonne puissante reine, je vous implore à deux genoux!
(Have pity, good powerful queen, I implore you on two knees!)

Transitioning into a much more emphatic statement as their desperation grows, Massenet speeds up the tempo and adds expressive markings such as “*avec ardeur*” (with ardor).

The Prince sings passionately about his troubles while describing how he will triumphantly overcome them. He swears to “submit the world, the earth and the seas to slavery in order to get her back and to be able to see her again and cherish her.”

At this statement, Cendrillon realizes that the desolate young man is the Prince, and although they cannot see each other, she declares her love for him and finally gives him her name. Ascending lines in the strings build and quickly pull back before Cendrillon speaks. It’s a wonderful moment, and Massenet references, but does not quote directly, part of the duet in Act II, in which Cendrillon refers to herself as “*l’inconnue*” or the unknown, but this time she calls herself “*Lucette*” before repeating the familiar refrain of “*vous etes mon prince charmant... .*”

On the downbeat of the word “*charmant*” the orchestra lightly enters with a rich tapestry of colors. The low brass provides support as the prince begins a sensitively rendered line echoed in unison with the strings (it might almost remind one of a Puccini melody), before the pair begin a call and response passage in ascending leaps that seem to be “sighing” as they sing of their growing desire to see each other. The orchestra grows larger and more dramatic with each passing bar while the two declare their love for each other. They echo each other with the lines “*Et sa voix me pénètre, d’une extase sùpreme*” (“his /her voice touches me with a supreme

ecstasy”), and Cendrillon is given soaring repetitions of the word “*sûpreme*” that ascend by half step each of the three times that it is repeated, before two voices come together again in a passionate unison plea on the highest note in the duet, a Bflat5, to the fairy godmother. The Prince offers his heart as a payment, if he is just allowed to see her, and the fairy agrees.

Overwhelmed at finally seeing each other again and supported by a soft chorus of spirits in a chorale-like tune setting, the prince calls out to her, now using her name, and Massenet again references the memorable “*vous etez mon prince charmant*” from the duet in Act II. The strings softly play in the higher register, shimmering above the texture, and Massenet’s music perfectly captures this ethereal realm, as the Fairy Godmother hauntingly vocalizes atop a faint, sometimes whispering, sometimes wordless chorus of spirits. The couple sings together in homorhythm as they profess their faithful love to each other while La Fée offers a hopeful text that sends the two off to sleep: “*Ah! Aimez! Aimez-vous; l’heure est brève: et croyez en un rêve!*” (“Ah! Love! Love one another, the time is brief, and believe in a dream!”).

These selected scenes are only a few of the wonderful moments in Massenet’s *Cendrillon*, and they provide a glimpse into a dramatically and vocally rich role for a lyric mezzo-soprano. In the character of Cendrillon, Massenet and Caïn have created a role with great depth, incredibly beautiful vocal lines, and something that is truly rare for mezzos in the operatic canon: the chance to end up with the prince.

Appendix: A Chronological List of Massenet's Stage Works

<u>Name of Work</u>	<u>Year Premiered</u>
<i>Les Deux Boursiers</i>	1859 - Lost
<i>Noureddin</i>	1865 - Sketches for an Opéra Comique
<i>Valéria</i>	1865 - Sketches for an Italian Opera
<i>La Grand' Tante</i>	1867
<i>Esméralda</i>	Composed in Rome - never performed or printed
<i>Méduse</i>	1868-70 - never performed or printed
<i>La Coupe du roi de Thulé</i>	1872 - never performed (composed from the suggested libretto of the Paris Opera Competition of 1867 - ensembles from here appear in later works)
<i>Le Florentin</i>	1868 - never performed (also composed from the suggested libretto from the Paris Opera Competition of 1867)
<i>Manfred</i>	1869
<i>Don César de Bazan</i>	1872
<i>L'Adorable Bel-Boul</i>	1873 - Destroyed
<i>Berengère et Anatole</i>	1876
<i>Le Roi de Lahore</i>	1877
<i>Robert de France</i>	1880
<i>Hérodiade</i>	1881
<i>Les Girodins</i>	1881
<i>Manon</i>	1884
<i>Le Cid</i>	1885
<i>Esclarmonde</i>	1889

<i>Le Mage</i>	1891
<i>Werther</i>	1892
<i>Le Carillon</i>	1892
<i>Thaïs</i>	1894
<i>Le Portrait de Manon</i>	1894
<i>La Navarraise</i>	1894
<i>Sapho</i>	1897
<i>Cendrillon</i>	1899
<i>Grisélidis</i>	1901
<i>Le Jongleur de Notre Dame</i>	1902
<i>Marie-Magdeleine</i>	Though originally written as an oratorio, it was later staged as an opera in 1903
<i>Chérubin</i>	1905
<i>Ariane</i>	1906
<i>Thérèse</i>	1907
<i>Bacchus</i>	1909
<i>Don Quichotte</i>	1910
<i>Roma</i>	1912
<i>Panurge</i>	1913
<i>Cléopâtre</i>	1914
<i>Amadis</i>	1922
<i>Montalte</i>	Listed without date

²⁴ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and times* (Portland: Amadeus, 1994), 319-321.

Massenet also composed incidental music in several plays, which include: Delourede's *Hetman*, Sardou's *Theodora* and *Le Crocodile*. He also orchestrated and completed the opera *Kassya*, which Délibes left unfinished at the time of his death.²⁵

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²⁵ Finck, *Massenet*, 230.

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